TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF STATE HEALTH SERVICES

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JOHN HELLERSTEDT, M.D.
COMMISSIONER

March 2, 2016

Dear Local Government Leader:

I am writing today to ask for your help in protecting Texans from Zika virus, an emerging public health threat in Texas. As you likely know, Texas has identified fourteen Zika cases to-date. Fortunately, as of today, these cases are all directly or indirectly related to travel to areas of the world where spread of the virus is active and ongoing. But Texas and other parts of the United States are experiencing a growing number of travelers who have tested positive for Zika infection. While no evidence of local transmission currently exists, it is highly likely Texas will experience local transmission of Zika virus by mosquitoes at some point.

The steps outlined in this letter are intended to prevent or delay Zika virus being transmitted by local mosquito populations in Texas. These measures are effective when sustained throughout the regular mosquito season. Eliminating potential mosquito breeding areas, especially near homes and communities, is an effective way to protect against all mosquito-borne diseases, including Zika.

Local leaders can take action to help protect their communities from Zika virus. The following community-wide and individual actions are recommended to help prevent or delay local transmission of Zika virus in our state and reduce the potential spread of Zika among Texans.

Measures for Local Leaders to Protect Communities from Zika Virus:

- Initiate or enhance monitoring and surveillance of mosquito activity.
- Accelerate mosquito abatement efforts.
- Develop a local contingency plan for mosquito abatement and surveillance; plan for additional control measures if needed.
- Implement efforts to clean up illegal dump sites and collect heavy trash.
- Encourage people to report illegal dumpsites and standing water, and respond quickly to these complaints.
- Keep public drains and ditches clear of weeds and trash so water will not collect.
- Treat standing water with larvicide (such as mosquito "dunks") when it cannot be drained and the water will be present for more than seven days.
- Conduct neighborhood outreach about precautions individuals can take to protect themselves and their families from mosquito bites.

There are also steps that individuals can take in and around their own homes to help protect themselves and their communities and to help reduce potential mosquito breeding habitats.

Zika Letter to Local Government Leaders
March 2, 2016

Please assist us in spreading the following messages to your constituents.

Measures for Individuals to Prevent Mosquito Breeding:

- At least weekly empty or get rid of cans, buckets, old tires, pots, plant saucers and other containers that hold water.
- Keep gutters clear of debris and standing water.
- Remove standing water around structures and from flat roofs.
- Change water in pet dishes daily.
- Rinse and scrub vases and other indoor water containers weekly.
- Change water in wading pools and bird baths several times a week.
- Maintain backyard pools or hot tubs.
- Cover trash containers.
- Water lawns and gardens carefully so water does not stand for several days.
- Screen rain barrels and openings to water tanks or cisterns.
- Treat front and back door areas of homes with residual insecticides if mosquitoes are abundant nearby.
- If mosquito problems persist, consider pesticide applications for vegetation around the home.

In addition to mosquito-control strategies, the best way to avoid infection is to prevent mosquito bites by taking a few simple steps. Please encourage individuals living in your communities to take these precautions to protect themselves and their families.

Measures for Individuals to Protect Themselves from Mosquito Bites:

- Wear insect repellent.
- Cover up with long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Keep mosquitoes out with air conditioning or intact window screens.
- Limit outdoor activities during peak mosquito times.

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is available to assist you, should you have questions about how to effectively prevent Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses in your communities. Please feel free to send any questions to TexasZika@dshs.state.tx.us. For more information about Zika virus, please also visit the DSHS Zika website at www.TexasZika.org. In addition to pertinent information about transmission and prevention, the website also includes resources you can distribute in your community to spread the message of Zika prevention.

I encourage all communities to take action now to address the threat of Zika virus in Texas. Together, we can reduce the impact of Zika and other mosquito-borne diseases in Texas. We must prepare and begin our efforts before weather conditions allow mosquitoes to proliferate. Thank you for your assistance in this important public health matter.

Sincerely,

John Hellerstedt, M.D.
Commissioner